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SECOND FORMER STATE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY ACCESSING CONFIDENTIAL PASSPORT FILES

WASHINGTON – A second former State Department employee pleaded guilty today to illegally accessing hundreds of confidential passport application files, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division announced.

Dwayne F. Cross, 41, of Upper Marlboro, Md., pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge John M. Facciola in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to a one-count criminal information charging him with unauthorized computer access.

According to court documents, from August 2001 through February 2008, Cross served as an administrative assistant in the Diplomatic Security Abduction Unit, Counter Intelligence at the State Department. He returned to the State Department in March 2008 as a contract employee working as a contract specialist for the acquisitions office. According to information contained in plea documents, Cross admitted he had access to official State Department computer databases in the regular course of his employment, including the Passport Information Electronic Records System (PIERS), which contains, among other data, all imaged passport applications dating back to 1994. The imaged passport applications on PIERS contain, among other things, a photograph of the passport applicant as well as certain personal information including the applicant's full name, date and place of birth, current address, telephone numbers, parent information, spouse's name and emergency contact information. These confidential files are protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, and access by State Department employees is strictly limited to official government duties.

In pleading guilty, Cross admitted that between January 2002 and August 2007, he logged onto the PIERS database and viewed the passport applications of more than 150 celebrities, actors, musicians, comedians, models, politicians, athletes, members of the media, family members, friends, associates and other individuals. Cross admitted that he had no official government reason to access and view these passport applications, but that his sole purpose in accessing and viewing these passport applications was idle curiosity.

Cross is the second former State Department employee to plead guilty in this continuing investigation. On Sept. 22, 2008, Lawrence C. Yontz, a former Foreign Service Officer and intelligence analyst pleaded guilty to unlawfully accessing hundreds of confidential passport

files. Yontz was sentenced on Dec. 19, 2008, to 12 months of probation and ordered to perform 50 hours of community service. Sentencing for Cross is scheduled for March 23, 2009.

The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Armando O. Bonilla of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, headed by Section Chief William M. Welch II. The case is being investigated by the State Department Office of Inspector General.

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